



Summary :

A dignitary of Trebizond and an eunuch, he lived during the first half of the 14th century. He bore the title of *mezas doukas* and played an important role in the internal affairs of the Empire of Trebizond during the fourth and the early fifth decades of the 14th century, by actively participating in the civil war which broke out after the death of Basil Grand Komnenos between the local aristocracy and Eirene Palaiologina. He also made a reputation as founder and donor of a number of monasteries.

Date and Place of Death

March of 1334, Limnia

Main Role

Dignitary of the Empire of Trebizond

1. General information

John the eunuch was a dignitary of [Trebizond](#) who lived during the first half of the 14th century. There is no evidence in the sources regarding his descent, but apparently he did not belong to any notable aristocratic family. It is more likely that he rose thanks to his competence. He bore the high ranking title of *mezas doukas* which meant that he was commander of the naval forces of Trebizond.¹ He lived in Limnia, a town on the coast of the Black Sea, which was a naval base. It is certain that John the eunuch played an important role in the internal affairs of the Empire of Trebizond during the mid-14th century.

2. Career

The *mezas doukas* John is first mentioned in connection to the events which followed the change on the throne of Trebizond when, after the brief reigns of [Andronikos III Grand Komnenos](#) (1332-1332) and [Manuel II Grand Komnenos](#) (January-September 1332), [Basil Grand Komnenos](#) (1332-1340) rose to the throne. The new emperor had Byzantine support and the support of some pro-Byzantine dignitaries. The measures he took shortly after his ascend against the local aristocracy of non Greek descent² are characteristic, while shortly afterwards Basil married [Eirene Palaiologina](#), the illegitimate daughter of the Byzantine Emperor [Andronikos III Palaiologos](#). According to information by [Michael Panaretos](#), on February 21st, 1333 the *mezas doukas* John participated in the events during which the recently deposed emperor Manuel II Grand Komnenos was murdered. This proves the eunuch John's own pro-Byzantine sentiment, a hypothesis further confirmed by latter events.

2.1. Participation in the civil war

A few years later the eunuch John was involved in the civil war of the Empire of Trebizond, supporting Eirene Palaiologina. Eirene, the wife of Basil Grand Komnenos, ascended to the throne after Basil's sudden death on 6 April 1340. The fact that she was not the legitimate successor to the throne of Trebizond (as she did not belong to the house of the Grand Komnenoi) on the one hand, and her strong ties with Byzantium from where she sought assistance on the other hand led some of the local aristocracy to turn against her. In the conflicts which followed, the *mezas doukas* John sided with Eirene, thus expressing his pro-Byzantine attitude once again.



According to the sources, on July the 2nd 1340 John arrived to Trebizond from the fortress of Limnia with a substantial army.³ In the battle which followed the [monastery of St. Eugenios](#) was set afire and all its surrounding buildings were destroyed by the fire. The eunuch John arrested certain notable representatives of the opposing party; among them was the noble Tzanihites, who was taken to Limnia and was later executed there.

3. Death

The eunuch John was murdered in March of 1344, under uncertain circumstances. It is however reasonable to suppose that it was a political act by his opponents, as the *mezas doukas* was responsible for the detention at Limnia of [Michael Grand Komnenos](#), who was crowned emperor after John's death.

4. Donor and founder of monasteries

The eunuch John had a reputation of a great donor and founder of monasteries. He founded the monasteries of [Theoskepastos](#) and of the Faros. He supported the latter financially through numerous donations. He also accorded donations to the [Soumela monastery](#).

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2. Karpov, S.P., «Trapezund i Konstantinopol v XIV veke», *Vizantijskij vremennik* 36 (1974), p. 86.
3. Uspenskij, F.I., *Očerki iz istorii Trapazuntskoj imperii* (Leningrad 1929), pp. 102-103.

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	Miklosich F., Müller J. , <i>Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana I-VI</i> , Vienna 1860-1890
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	Laurent V. , "Deux chrysobulles inédits des empereurs de Trébizonde Alexis IV – Jean IV et David II", <i>Αρχείον Πόντου</i> , 18, 1953, 241-278



Glossary :



megas doukas

The commander of the Byzantine fleet (from 1092 onwards). In the Late Byzantine period, the title of the *megas doukas* was assigned to the highest officials of the imperial administration/army.

Sources

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Chronological Table

February 1333: Involvement of John the eunuch in the murder of Manuel II Grand Komnenos

July 1340: Eunuch John supports Emperess Eirene Palaiologina in Trebizond

March 1344: Eunuch John is murdered at Limnia